

ARTICLE 7. INTAKE

SUBARTICLE 1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

SECTION 20-7-480. Purpose. [SC ST SEC 20-7-480]

(A) Any intervention by the State into family life on behalf of children must be guided by law, by strong philosophical underpinnings, and by sound professional standards for practice. Child Welfare Services must be based on these principles:

- (1) Parents have the primary responsibility for and are the primary resource for their children.
- (2) Children should have the opportunity to grow up in a family unit if at all possible.
- (3) State and community agencies have a responsibility to implement prevention programs aimed at identifying high risk families and to provide supportive intervention to reduce occurrence of maltreatment.
- (4) Services for families should be accessible and designed to encourage and enable families to adequately deal with their problems within their own family system.
- (5) All child welfare intervention by the State has as its primary goal the welfare and safety of the child.
- (6) Child welfare intervention into a family's life should be structured so as to avoid a child's entry into the protective service and foster care systems if at all possible.
- (7) The state's child welfare system must be designed to be child-centered, family-focused, community-based, and culturally competent in its prevention and protection efforts.
- (8) Neighborhoods and communities are the primary source of opportunities and supports for families and have a primary responsibility in assuring the safety and vitality of their members.
- (9) The Department of Social Services shall collaborate with the community to identify, support, and treat families in a nonthreatening manner, in both investigative and family assessment situations.
- (10) A family assessment approach, stressing the safety of the child, building on the strengths of the family, and identifying and treating the family's needs is the appropriate approach for cases not requiring law enforcement involvement or the removal of the child.
- (11) Only a comparatively small percentage of current child abuse and neglect reports are

criminal in nature or will result in the removal of the child or alleged perpetrator.

(12) Should removal of a child become necessary, the state's foster care system must be prepared to provide timely and appropriate placements for children with relatives or in licensed foster care settings and to establish a plan which reflects a commitment by the State to achieving permanency for the child within reasonable timelines.

(13) The Department of Social Services staff who investigates serious child abuse and neglect reports with law enforcement must be competent in law enforcement procedures, fact finding, evidence gathering, and effective social intervention and assessment.

(14) Services should be identified quickly and should build on the strengths and resources of families and communities.

(B) It is the purpose of this article to:

(1) acknowledge the different intervention needs of families;

(2) establish an effective system of services throughout the State to safeguard the well-being and development of endangered children and to preserve and stabilize family life, whenever appropriate;

(3) ensure permanency on a timely basis for children when removal from their homes is necessary;

(4) establish fair and equitable procedures, compatible with due process of law to intervene in family life with due regard to the safety and welfare of all family members; and

(5) establish an effective system of protection of children from injury and harm while living in public and private residential agencies and institutions meant to serve them.

SECTION 20-7-490. Definitions. [SC ST SEC 20-7-490]

When used in this article, or in Article 9, Article 11, or subarticle 7 of Article 13, and unless the specific context indicates otherwise:

(1) "Child" means a person under the age of eighteen.

(2) "Child abuse or neglect", or "harm" occurs when the parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare:

(a) inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child physical or mental injury or engages in acts or omissions which present a substantial risk of physical or mental injury to the child, including injuries sustained as a result of excessive corporal punishment, but excluding corporal punishment or physical discipline which:

- (i) is administered by a parent or person in loco parentis;
- (ii) is perpetrated for the sole purpose of restraining or correcting the child;
- (iii) is reasonable in manner and moderate in degree;
- (iv) has not brought about permanent or lasting damage to the child; and
- (v) is not reckless or grossly negligent behavior by the parents.

(b) commits or allows to be committed against the child a sexual offense as defined by the laws of this State or engages in acts or omissions that present a substantial risk that a sexual offense as defined in the laws of this State would be committed against the child;

(c) fails to supply the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or education as required under Article 1 of Chapter 65 of Title 59, supervision appropriate to the child's age and development, or health care though financially able to do so or offered financial or other reasonable means to do so and the failure to do so has caused or presents a substantial risk of causing physical or mental injury. However, a child's absences from school may not be considered abuse or neglect unless the school has made efforts to bring about the child's attendance, and those efforts were unsuccessful because of the parents' refusal to cooperate. For the purpose of this chapter "adequate health care" includes any medical or nonmedical remedial health care permitted or authorized under state law;

(d) abandons the child;

(e) encourages, condones, or approves the commission of delinquent acts by the child and the commission of the acts are shown to be the result of the encouragement, condonation, or approval; or

(f) has committed abuse or neglect as described in subsections (a) through (e) such that a child who subsequently becomes part of the person's household is at substantial risk of one of those forms of abuse or neglect.

(3) "A person responsible for a child's welfare" includes the child's parent, guardian, foster parent, an operator, employee, or caregiver, as defined by Section 20-7-2700, of a public or private residential home, institution, agency, or childcare facility or an adult who has assumed the role or responsibility of a parent or guardian for the child, but who does not necessarily have legal custody of the child. A person whose only role is as a caregiver and whose contact is only incidental with a child, such as a babysitter or a person who has only incidental contact but may not be a caretaker, has not assumed the role or responsibility of a parent or guardian. An investigation pursuant to Section 20-7-650 must be initiated when the information contained in a report otherwise sufficient under this section does not establish whether the person has assumed the role or responsibility of a parent or guardian for the child.

(4) "Physical injury" means death or permanent or temporary disfigurement or impairment of any bodily organ or function.

(5) "Mental injury" means an injury to the intellectual, emotional, or psychological capacity or functioning of a child as evidenced by a discernible and substantial impairment of the child's ability to function when the existence of that impairment is supported by the opinion of a mental health professional or medical professional.

(6) "Institutional child abuse and neglect" means situations of known or suspected child abuse or neglect where the person responsible for the child's welfare is the employee of a public or private residential home, institution, or agency.

(7) "Protective services unit" means the unit established within the Department of Social Services which has prime responsibility for state efforts to strengthen and improve the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

(8) "Subject of the report" means a person who is alleged or determined to have abused or neglected the child, who is mentioned by name in a report or finding.

(9) "Suspected report" means all initial reports of child abuse or neglect received pursuant to this article.

(10) "Unfounded report" means a report made pursuant to this article for which there is not a preponderance of evidence to believe that the child is abused or neglected. For the purposes of this article, it is presumed that all reports are unfounded unless the department determines otherwise.

(11) "Indicated report" means a report of child abuse or neglect supported by facts which warrant a finding by a preponderance of evidence that abuse or neglect is more likely than not to have occurred.

(12) "Probable cause" means facts and circumstances based upon accurate and reliable information, including hearsay, that would justify a reasonable person to believe that a child subject to a report under this article is abused or neglected.

(13) "Preponderance of evidence" means evidence which, when fairly considered, is more convincing as to its truth than the evidence in opposition.

(14) "Department" means the Department of Social Services.

(15) "Child protective investigation" means an inquiry conducted by the department in response to a report of child abuse or neglect made pursuant to this article.

(16) "Child protective services" means assistance provided by the department as a result of indicated reports or affirmative determinations of child abuse or neglect, including

assistance ordered by the family court or consented to by the family. The objectives of child protective services are to:

- (a) protect the child's safety and welfare; and
- (b) maintain the child within the family unless the safety of the child requires placement outside the home.

(17) "Affirmative determination" means a finding by a preponderance of evidence that the child was abused or neglected by the person who is alleged or determined to have abused or neglected the child and who is mentioned by name in a report or finding. This finding may be made only by:

- (a) the court;
- (b) the Department of Social Services upon a final agency decision in its appeals process; or
- (c) waiver by the subject of the report of his right to appeal. If an affirmative determination is made by the court after an affirmative determination is made by the Department of Social Services, the court's finding must be the affirmative determination.

(18) "Court" means the family court.

(19) "Abandonment of a child" means a parent or guardian wilfully deserts a child or wilfully surrenders physical possession of a child without making adequate arrangements for the child's needs or the continuing care of the child.

(20) "Guardianship of a child" means the duty and authority vested in a person by the family court to make certain decisions regarding a child, including:

- (a) consenting to a marriage, enlistment in the armed forces, and medical and surgical treatment;
- (b) representing a child in legal actions and to make other decisions of substantial legal significance affecting a child; and
- (c) rights and responsibilities of legal custody when legal custody has not been vested by the court in another person, agency, or institution.

(21) "Legal custody" means the right to the physical custody, care, and control of a child; the right to determine where the child shall live; the right and duty to provide protection, food, clothing, shelter, ordinary medical care, education, supervision, and discipline for a child and in an emergency to authorize surgery or other extraordinary care. The court may in its order place other rights and duties with the legal custodian. Unless otherwise provided by court order, the parent or guardian retains the right to make decisions of

substantial legal significance affecting the child, including consent to a marriage, enlistment in the armed forces, and major nonemergency medical and surgical treatment, the obligation to provide financial support or other funds for the care of the child, and other residual rights or obligations as may be provided by order of the court.

(22) "Party in interest" includes the child, the child's attorney and guardian ad litem, the natural parent, an individual with physical or legal custody of the child, the foster parent, and the local foster care review board.

(23) "Physical custody" means the lawful, actual possession and control of a child.

(24) "Emergency protective custody" means the right to physical custody of a child for a temporary period of no more than twenty-four hours to protect the child from imminent danger.

Emergency protective custody may be taken only by a law enforcement officer pursuant to this article.